

P R E S S R E L E A S E

DRIVE DROVEN DRIVEN

Cars in Contemporary Photography

Press Preview: Friday, 26 January 2018, 11 a.m. – 1 p.m.

Opening: Sunday, 28 January 2018, 12 noon
Speakers: Heike Schmitt-Schmelz (District Councilor of Berlin Charlottenburg-Wilmersdorf),
Elke von der Lieth (Director, Kommunale Galerie Berlin)
Introduction: Dr. Matthias Harder

Duration: 28 January – 08 April 2018

Location: Kommunale Galerie, Hohenzollerndamm 176, 10713 Berlin



Beni Bischof, Untitled, from the series: Handicapped Cars, 2014, copyright + courtesy Beni Bischof

After the first exhibition stop in Omaha (Nebraska/USA) the **Kommunale Galerie Berlin** will open the group show **DRIVE DROVE DRIVEN**, curated by Matthias Harder, on **28 January 2018**, featuring works by: Clara Bahlsen, Jürgen Baumann, Xiomara Bender, Beni Bischof, Daniela Comani, Stephan Erfurt, Larry Ferguson, Aris Georgiou, Oliver Godow, James Hendrickson, Charles Johnstone, Martin Klimas, Jens Liebchen, Serge Marcel Martinot, Arwed Messmer, Ralf Meyer, Bernhard Moosbauer, Melina Papageorgiou, Philipp von Recklinghausen, Christian Rothmann, Marc Volk, Maurice Weiss, and Michael Witte.

For more than a century, cars have had a decisive impact on our daily life, and few other commonplace objects have so divided public opinion. Cars are both curse and blessing, design sensation and environmental killer. Going beyond their pragmatic role as a means of transport and transportation, they serve a social function that is far from neutral. Cars are projection surfaces for desires and aspirations, as tokens of flexibility and freedom, and status symbols connoting power, wealth, prestige, and sex. Highly innovative automotive industries in countries such as Germany, Italy, and the United States cultivate this aura through compelling advertising images, bolstered by an influential car lobby. Against this backdrop, design engineers develop high-performance vehicles with turbocharged motors and fast acceleration paired with the promise of an oasis of well-being: airbag-protected and, more recently, self-parking, with self-driving "autonomous" systems in the works. In Germany, the absence of speed limits on many sections of the *Autobahn* highway system allows people to ride the roads at breakneck speeds like a Formula One race car. Though this might fulfill drivers' thirst for life in the literal fast lane, it also leads to tragic accidents, time and again.

In 1973, British writer J.G. Ballard wrote *Crash*, a dark parable on our obsession with speed and the erotic thrill of being in a car accident, which was spectacularly filmed by David Cronenberg in 1996. A number of photographers took up the theme in their own medium, Helmut Newton notably among them. In the early twentieth century, the Futurists declared the speed of a car to be an aesthetic principle and a fundamental aspect of modernity, declaring that a "racing car...is more beautiful than the Nike of Samothrace." Later, the car became the metaphor par excellence for collective middle-class prosperity – examples include the Ford Model T in America and the Volkswagen Beetle during the Third Reich and then in democratic Germany. Cars have been endowed with eye-catching design – as seen in early models of the Citroën, Mercedes, and Ferrari – or celebrated as a sign of individualism, with limited series cars and personalized car tuning offered as a unique selling point.

At the same time, cars are responsible for air pollution, rising carbon emissions, and traffic-related deaths around the globe. If rapid motorization continues at its current rate in the emerging and future world powers of India and China with their population of billions, humanity will soon have no more air to breathe – despite the development of electric and hybrid engines. Yet this has done nothing to stop the annual car shows and salons in Detroit, Geneva, Paris, and Shanghai, which draw millions of visitors. In terms of private use, there are two prevailing ideologies that are diametrically opposed: for some, the car should be luxurious both inside and out, while others seek an "eco-friendly" solution that reduces harmful emissions – this is one reason why car-sharing in Europe is gaining in popularity. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, it has begun to dawn on us that relying exclusively on internal combustion engines – which depend on the increasingly rare and expensive resource of oil in the form of gasoline – makes less and less sense, and is also disrespectful to nature. Most Europeans cannot comprehend the American preference for gas-guzzling SUVs, yet Germany in particular enjoys the international export of its fast luxury cars, now mainly to Asia, with the number of consumers able and willing to buy them growing year by year. Since the invention of the first gasoline-powered automobile engines by Gottlieb Daimler and Carl Benz in 1885, countless cars have been screwed, welded, and even glued together, and human hands have been succeeded by fully automated production lines. The vast majority of cars are scrapped and recycled, while more than a billion cars currently roll on the roads worldwide.

In modern and contemporary art, the car has repeatedly figured as a motif, from Andy Warhol and Arman to Sylvie Fleury and Gabriel Orozco. It has starred in film classics such as *The French Connection* and *Bullitt*, not to mention the many James Bond adventures where BMWs or Aston Martins often play a key (supporting) role – depending on how much the manufacturers bring into the film budget. And contemporary photographers on both sides of the Atlantic have created iconic images that take the car far beyond its commercial depictions as a mere commodity.

Here, 23 photographers are introduced with incredibly diverse individual works and series that represent the bandwidth of today's artistic approaches to this beloved theme. We are confronted with images of accidents and empty streets, of cars that are neatly parked or abandoned and deteriorating, of vintage car rallies with their museum-like display, photographic destructions and collages, and several interpretations of the proverbial state of being "on the road."

The selection offers a multifaceted view of society that reveals both a requiem for our car-driven civilization and an ode to our never-ending fascination with the car in its many incarnations – from household asset to design icon. Conceptual interventions stand alongside sociological studies, as cars are beautified, marginalized, or magnified in their detail. We encounter the car as the protagonist of a veritable road movie, even as the car has lost its topmost ranking among the possessions most desired by Europe’s millennial drivers. While this unique exhibition of contemporary photography dedicated to the car signals our shift into a high-tech mobile future, the future of cars themselves is marked by uncertainty.

Opening hours: Tuesday - Friday 10 a.m. - 5 p.m., Wednesday 10 a.m. - 7 p.m.,
Sunday 11 a.m. - 5 p.m. | free admission

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Bezirksamt Charlottenburg-Wilmersdorf von Berlin,
Abteilung Jugend, Familie, Bildung, Sport und Kultur,
Fachbereich Kultur

For press material and interviews, please contact:

Nadine Dinter PR | Nadine Dinter | Fasanenstrasse 70, 10719 Berlin

Tel: +49 (0)30/398 87 411 | Mobil: +49 (0)151 123 70 951 | E-Mail: presse@nadine-dinter.de